

Alan W. Raymond
16 Scenic Drive, Ap't N
Croton-on-Hudson, NY 10520

Helen R. Phillips
510 Hulls Farm Road
Southport, CT 06890

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To the DDS Appropriations Committee:

We, Alan W. Raymond and Helen R. Phillips, have been the respective plenary and standby guardians of our brother, Duncan Raymond, since October 1997. Due to injuries sustained at birth (October 29, 1938), Duncan has been intellectually disabled his whole life. He is now 78 and has been a resident of Southbury Training School (STS) for the last 53 years.

His disability became apparent at the age of three, and from 1942 to 1963 he resided in two privately-owned special schools recommended by our family physician in consultation with other experts.

In 1963, the second school informed our late mother that it was moving to Florida and gave her a limited time to make other arrangements for Duncan, who was then 25. Fortunately, STS was still open to new admissions, and he entered in March 1964.

We have often visited STS since we became Duncan's guardians, and are impressed by the conscientious and loving care he receives. He is happy, well-liked, and diligently cared for as health problems inevitably increase with age. (A few years ago a stent was inserted to lower the risk of a heart attack, and more recently a blocked carotid artery was cleared to prevent a stroke.)

Duncan is subject to painful headaches, and it is a tribute to STS's nursing staff that they followed up on our speculation that the headaches might be migraine (which runs in our family). As a result, he has been put on medications which help relieve the pain and shorten the duration of such attacks.

He is also deaf, which raises concerns about his safety in vehicular traffic. Given the lighter traffic on the grounds of STS, we feel he is safer there than he would be anywhere else. In addition, his room has a special light to alert him to possible emergencies when he is awake, and a mechanism to shake his bed when he is asleep.

His deafness and almost inaudible speech make it hard for us to communicate with him, but STS's trained and experienced staff has worked with him to solve the problem by a combination of gestures and lip reading. We have to wonder how long it would take the staff anywhere else to develop a similar relationship with him.

At a US District Court hearing in New Haven (Judge Burns presiding) which we attended a few years ago, we heard testimony to the effect that the staff turnover rate at group homes is almost TEN TIMES the rate at STS. To us, that alone speaks volumes for the motivation, training, experience, and dedication of STS's staff.

On the issue of closing STS and moving its residents to group homes: moving is a stressful experience even for people with normal faculties; how much more stressful for someone like Duncan, who couldn't begin to understand why he might be suddenly torn from familiar faces and surroundings, and placed among strangers? We hope that as Duncan approaches 80, he can spend his remaining years in the only home he has known for most of his life.

We think Southbury Training School is a priceless and irreplaceable resource whose facilities, instead of being shut down, might be made available to help those on DDS's waiting list. Its closure would be a tragic loss not only to the current generation of those who are disabled through no fault of their own, but to future generations as well.

Thank you for your consideration.

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